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Michel Foucault and Qualitative Research in Human and Social Sciences

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Key words: Michel Foucault; qualitative research; humanities; ethnography; philosophy

Abstract: In this article, I analyze the methodological contributions of Michel FOUCAULT, highlighting his affinity with qualitative strategies of research in the human and social sciences. I propose a theoretical study on the subject, working with historical and conceptual aspects of Michel FOUCAULT's methodology and its application to qualitative research. This text is organized into three analytical axes: a discussion of the methodological questions developed by Michel FOUCAULT; a correlation of his perspective with contemporary literature about qualitative research; and an analysis of the methodological design of his final research. I emphasize his decision to study problems from their "most singular and concrete forms." I explore the outline of his final research on the genealogy of the modern subject, analyzing the reasons for his methodological choices. Finally, I propose that the construction of relevant research problems, handled with detail and precision, and using classic research methods, contributed to the incisive impact of his work in the field of human and social sciences.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Michel FOUCAULT has become a reference for research in the human and social sciences all over the world, notably in English-speaking countries. His influence has increased after his death in 1984, favored by the posthumous publication of his interviews and articles, as well as his courses at the *Collége de France*. Thomas LEMKE (2012, p.1) considers that a comprehensive study of the secondary literature based on FOUCAULT's work is "quite impossible." He also reminds us that the publication of the book "The Foucault Effect" (BURCHELL, GORDON & MILLER, 1991) marked the beginning of a growing interest in the philosopher's work, particularly in Britain, Australia, and Canada, which has since gradually increased. This expansion of Michel FOUCAULT's influence began in the 1970s with his visits to the United States and Canada and with the translation of "Discipline and Punish" (FOUCAULT, 1977 [1975]). In a survey carried out in 2007 by *Times Higher Education*, Michel FOUCAULT was considered the most cited name in the human and social sciences in the last few decades (KELLY, 2014). [1]

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Curiously, Michel FOUCAULT's impact has been proportionally less intense in his field of origin, philosophy, than in the wider field of the human sciences, such as psychology, law, history, geography, education, sociology, linguistics, anthropology, and political science (FAUBION, 2014). In the fifth edition of "The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research" (DENZIN & LINCOLN, 2018), there are twenty-five direct quotations from Michel FOUCAULT's texts in the author index, against less than seven quotations from other relevant authors, such as Howard BECKER, James CLIFFORD, and Clifford GEERTZ. Furthermore, FOUCAULT's influence extends throughout several contemporary theoretical and methodological trends, such as post-structuralism, cultural studies, gender studies, and discourse analysis. Most of the methodological discussion inspired by Michel FOUCAULT's work is concentrated in discourse analysis. This growing field of studies has surpassed its French origin—initially anchored in the connection between Michel PÊCHEUX and Michel FOUCAULT (MANGUENEAU & ANGERMÜLLER, 2007)—and has generated strong international debate. These studies have produced variations through different appropriations of Michel FOUCAULT's contributions in dialogue with other theoretical-methodological approaches. There are dialogues with the sociology of knowledge (KELLER, 2005), with positioning theory (TIRADO & GÁLVEZ, 2007), and even with the work of Max WEBER (WICKHAM & KENDALL, 2007). [2]

The reasons for the notable reception of Michel FOUCAULT in the scope of the human and social sciences are highlighted in this article. Colin KOOPMAN offers one reason, describing Michel FOUCAULT as a critical researcher who brought philosophical reflection to the "empirical rigor of the historical-anthropological social scientist" (KOOPMAN, 2013, p.155). In other words, there is a methodological reason for FOUCAULT's reception, which will be explored in this article—namely that FOUCAULT uses methodological procedures similar to those used in qualitative research. [3]

There is also a thematic reason for his works' acceptance. His research, of a philosophical origin, approached fields that were distant from the mainstream of the field, that is, studies based on the history of philosophy itself. Referring to his journey, Michel FOUCAULT points out that: "[d]oing philosophy in those days, and today as well in fact, mainly amounted to doing the history of philosophy" (2000a [1980], p.246), which was defined at that time by Friedrich HEGEL's philosophy of systems and by phenomenology. Instead of debating with classic authors within this field, FOUCAULT dedicated himself, on the one hand, to psychiatry, medicine, the human sciences, prisons, sexuality, and to the Greek and Roman arts of existence in his books. In his lectures at the *Collège de France*, on the other hand, he devoted his attention to the inquiry, abnormality, sovereignty, the State, neoliberalism, the self and the government practices of others. [4]

It is important to recognize an innovative aspect of Michel FOUCAULT's work, the non-conventional philosophical exercise in a field that is "foreign" to historical studies. His objective was not, strictly speaking, historical analysis, but rather to approach what he saw as the most important philosophical problem: the question

of the present time and what "we are in this very moment" (2000a [1980], p.242). He formulated his focus in the following manner:

> "[...] my problem is to construct myself, and invite others to share an experience of what we are, not only our past but also our present, an experience of our modernity in such a way that we might come out of it transformed" (p.240). [5]

When communicating his research results, he sought to construct a text experience that, besides content, brought the reader some kind of transformative experience, not only of what one thinks but also of what one is. This approach—writing the results of his research by means of text experience—was shared by other French thinkers of his generation, such as Gilles DELEUZE and Jacques LACAN. To these contemporaries of his, writing was inseparable from the production of an experience that transforms what one thinks and what one is, and not merely a supposedly faithful reproduction of the studied reality. As critics of the notion of representation, FOUCAULT and some of his contemporaries sought another format and function for writing, in consonance with artistic and literary expression. Perhaps, for this reason the reception of these authors' works in France and other countries is marked by some level of captivated adherence, leading to a certain fetishistic appropriation of their texts through citing these authors as a self-evident argument of authority and value without question, which does not have the best consequences. [6]

This type of appropriation goes against the use Michel FOUCAULT made of his reference authors: he would mention them without necessarily having to quote them as "the authenticating label of a footnote" of the argument developed. An example he used was the fetishism created around Karl MARX, where quoting the author was the access code that guaranteed admission to the group. On another occasion, while mentioning the importance of Friedrich NIETZSCHE in his philosophical journey, Michel FOUCAULT said: "I prefer to utilize the writers I like" (1980a [1975], p.53), making this the greatest proof of acknowledgment, beyond quotation. This use of the author as an instrument for the construction of his own arguments diverges from the use that many current authors make of his work as an authenticating item of vicarious value, in which quotations confer a degree of quality or authority to the debate of ideas—in short, a use that is very distant from what FOUCAULT valued as the form of expression for critical thought. Consequently, the idea of innovation in Michel FOUCAULT's work avoids quoting authors who are regarded as innovative. [7]

It should be stressed that innovation has gained a strong contemporary value, both in business and academia. Innovation also affects the field of research methods, producing a vast literature that demands the use of innovative methods as a competitive strategy in the academic market, especially in research subjects with qualitative roots. Even so, there are studies that warn about the risks of abuse present in this trend, which may generate superficial concerns about complex questions (TRAVERS, 2009). Some authors suggest that "it encourages a focus on the latest methodological fads" (WILES, CROW & PAIN, 2013, p.601) to the detriment of the improvement of more established methods, in addition to

quickly making the studies outdated or even inappropriate. Thus, without neglecting the value and importance of theoretical-methodological innovations, these studies seek to contemplate the risks present in this well-encouraged trend, and I take a similar direction in this article. [8]

Because one of the uses of the idea of innovation is anchored in references to authors regarded as innovative, I seek in this study to oppose this present fad in the literature. My goal is to highlight another facet of Michel FOUCAULT, the use of classic methodological elements in his research. I defend the perspective that his work was based on rigorously constructed methods, explicitly presented, and composed of many classical elements. His contributions to theoretical and methodological fields thus did not dispense with a productive dialogue with consolidated traditions. The proposed discussion is not, therefore, about how to conduct research inspired by a Foucauldian methodology. Instead, I seek to highlight an aspect not often discussed by the literature: the proximity of the work carried out by Michel FOUCAULT with the established methodological strategies developed by the human and social sciences. In short, this is a theoretical study of the subject, in which I work with the historical and conceptual aspects of FOUCAULT's methodology and its application to qualitative research. [9]

This article is organized along three analytical lines. First, I carry out an analysis based on fragments of Michel FOUCAULT's work, with emphasis on his courses —in which there was frequent exposure of his methods—outlining his main methodological choices. Second, I establish similarities between his trajectory and the work of some relevant qualitative researchers, especially ethnographers. Finally, I explore his concern in offering a detailed exposition of his choices of method in his last published research. [10]

2. Methodological Choices in Michel FOUCAULT's Work

Bal SOKHI-BULLEY (2016, p.8) differentiates method from methodology when analyzing FOUCAULT's work. While the first term points to a concern in demonstrating the procedures that were used, dealing with the empirical issues involved, the second focuses on the paths of thought and involves a theoretical construction of the investigated object. "It is essentially about what you do in a project, as opposed to how to think it" (SOKHI-BULLEY, 2016, p.8). He suggests that FOUCAULT had a methodology—in other words, a reflection upon how to think about his subject, and not just a method, taken as a group of pre-defined procedures. As I propose further on, it would be best to affirm that FOUCAULT had one methodology, in the sense used by SOKHI-BULLEY, and different methods. [11]

In general, these definitions allow us to understand that the method implies a pathway with ordered procedures that seek to reach a determined result. On the one hand, our hegemonic model of scientific production preconizes the *a priori* definition of this investigative path. On the other hand, research within the social sciences considers a certain progressive "craft" in the organization of this

research, where instruments and objects are gradually refined (BECKER, 1992 [1970]). [12]

I propose an examination of how these two dimensions of method appear in Michel FOUCAULT's work, although he has no definitive text about his method. His methodological discussion is marked by variability, even though he sticks to certain general principles. In fact, he always stated that he did not have a general method, but that for every project he built a singular methodological path. In his words: "Each of my books is a way of carving out an object and of fabricating a method of analysis" (FOUCAULT, 2000a [1980], p. 240). [13]

If one understands method as being a set of instruments operated through a sequence of procedures to be executed in research, one could say that there is no single Foucauldian method. FOUCAULT considers that the method should be chosen depending on the case study and based on the construction of the problem or object of the research. It should lead the researcher to the choice of strategies, instruments, and arrangements. Because of that, the method understood as the path towards a result is not an *a priori* of the research. On the contrary, it is something that can be reviewed, rectified, or changed during the research process. [14]

Michel FOUCAULT worked mostly with a time-honored method from another area of knowledge, history: document-based research. To Thomas LEMKE, FOUCAULT's studies obeyed the "traditional criteria of historiographical work: they argue based on documents, rely on textual evidences" (LEMKE, 2013, p.31), and can, for this reason, be criticized in terms of argumentation and choice of the material. This is not about situating FOUCAULT as a historian, but about recognizing that his philosophical work was anchored in historical research. As he said: "My books are not treatises in philosophy or studies of history; at most, they are philosophical fragments put to work in a historical field of problems" (FOUCAULT, 1991a [1978], p.74). The use of "fragments" instead of "treatises" indicates his lack of interest in constructing a systematic philosophy, even though on many occasions he retrospectively sought to align, with coherence, different moments of his investigation. This was not the work of a historian, but instead the work of a philosopher intending to address problems at "their most singular and concrete forms" (ibid.), and, for this reason, had always raised "particular and limited questions" (FOUCAULT, 2000a [1980], p.285). This search for a problematization anchored to palpable elements distanced FOUCAULT from research on the history of philosophy, leading towards philosophical research on specific historical themes, such as madness, prisons, sexuality, and the modern subject. Anchoring his work in the study of localized problems did not prevent him, in other ways, from approaching general problems. [15]

To Michel FOUCAULT, his work was about researching from a localized empirical field and, at that level, presenting the crucial questions, while devising broader generalizations and concepts at a later moment. His formulation prescribed that "theoretical stakes are elaborated starting from a certain empirical domain" (FOUCAULT, 1989 [1984], p.295), which he called "problematization" (ibid.).

Tracking down some of the main methodological formulations present in his courses and books, it becomes evident that these work axes are central throughout his production. What I will seek to expound—while following elements of his methodological journey—is that if each research project enabled the construction of specific methodological instruments, his work style still fits into a certain frame that is relatively stable. As he affirmed in 1981: "My way of working hasn't changed much; but what I expect from it is that it will continue to change me" (2000b [1981], p.458). In his lectures at the *Collège de France*, FOUCAULT was always concerned about exposing his "methodological precautions," propositions of analysis, "choices of method" (1998 [1984], p.461), or his lines of analysis, which he always presented with variations of his work. [16]

I emphasize four aspects addressed in the discussions on method from those courses. The first one is the resistance of the author to provide fixed methodological principles. He would rather talk about precautions, propositions, and, when he mentioned "choices of method" (ibid.), he stressed the choice, and was not willing to propose guidelines. His "choices of method" explain the careful use of words. This caution was in accordance with his conviction that research is an experience that happens in the singular conjuncture of a project and that decisions are made throughout this journey. Although there are similar choices of method in the journey of a researcher or a group of researchers, these choices should be subject to the relevance of the construction of their object within the research process. [17]

The second aspect would be to understand what the relationship between theory and method is in his work. Michel FOUCAULT himself summarized the answer well, affirming that his work had as its starting point a certain field of practices, locally and historically defined, from which he would elaborate his great theoretical expositions. Therefore, the great Foucauldian concepts, such as disciplinary society and biopolitics, are not starting points for his analyses, but arrival points that emerge from detailed studies of local practices. [18]

We should read his books by following the "how" of his analyses, instead of focusing on the "what" when he talks about power as a general concept. Thus, starting from meticulous analyses of concrete practices at the local spectrum, in a predominantly inductive manner[1], Michel FOUCAULT slowly builds a broad theoretical-conceptual framework and insists on warning that it should not be understood as a circumscribed system, but rather, as a toolbox to be used in other studies. For this reason, he said he did not lean on a "continuous and systematic theoretical background" (2000a [1980], p.244). Research was about experimenting with ideas to change them based on questions raised from the study of a certain local reality. In this perspective, he extracts his self-definition in the beginning of the interview, claiming to be "an experimenter and not a theorist" (p.240). Moreover, the relationship between ideas already formulated and practices was not that of application, but of experimentation in other fields—after

1 I say "predominantly" for understanding that FOUCAULT's "methodological choices"—including theoretical order—anticipate the conditions of the analysis and that concrete research is never exclusively inductive or deductive (BERNARD & RYAN, 2010).

all, "an experimental attitude is necessary; at every moment, step by step, one must confront what one is thinking" (1984 [1983], p.374). As Thomas LEMKE suggests, "Foucault always formed his analytical instruments in relation to the historical objects he was concretely studying (madness, delinquency, sexuality, etc.) without providing a 'general theory'" (2012, p.99). For this reason, the author continues, it is strange that his concepts have become some kind of meta-narrative to be used with any object of investigation. Therefore, the use of Foucauldian concepts that is so disseminated today does not necessarily follow the same investigative path used by FOUCAULT, which has been noted by scholars such as Thomas LEMKE (2012) and Colin KOOPMAN (2013). In other words, reproducing the concepts that Michel FOUCAULT arrived at is not equivalent to following him in his investigative journey. [19]

The third central aspect in Michel FOUCAULT's journey is his nominalist criticism, embodied by his permanent criticism of the universal. Michel FOUCAULT, in his actions as a researcher, seeks to develop from that which is considered universal a contingently produced singularity. There is thus a break with the establishment of Cartesian evidence as a criterion of truth, so that through problematization an unnecessary contingency—liable to change—can be stressed during the analytical movement. In the journey that his reasoning undertakes, contingencies and singularities take the place of what was considered "natural" and universal. I point out that his position on this matter is mainly methodological, rather than ontological, because he does not postulate the inexistence of the universal, instead proposing a strategy to approach it based on "certain choices of method" (1998 [1984], p.461). [20]

While comparing two texts, one from 1968 and another from 1984, I noticed that the axis of the discussions had pronounced differences, but the work method had several similarities. In the earlier paper, Michel FOUCAULT deals with the analysis of discourses, within his perspective of the archeology of knowledge; in the second, he discusses the critical history of thinking in the relationships between subject and object. In the later text, the final synthesis of the Foucauldian journey is the problematization of the relationship between subject and truth. [21]

In 1968, he indicated his three criteria for discourse analysis. The first is one of formation, due to the existence of a set of rules for the formation of all its objects, concepts, and theoretical options. The second criterion is of transformation or threshold, aiming to define "at what threshold of transformation new rules of formation came into effect" (1991b [1968], p.54). The third is of correlation, which localizes the discourse in the context of other discourses and in the "non-discursive context in which it functions (institutions, social relations, economic and political conjuncture)" (ibid.). In 1984, the rules of the formation of objects were called "games of truth," and the object of interest of his research is the subject: "What are the process of subjectivation and objectivation that make it possible for the subject to become an object of knowledge, as a subject?" (1998 [1984], p.460) There is thus a constancy in the theoretical-methodological concerns, but

also a new set of concepts and lines of analysis that had not yet been explored in the 1960s, such as power, subjectivation, and the concept of experience. [22]

Subjectivity has been strongly emphasized in the social sciences. This discussion served to disqualify the scientific merit of qualitative research, seen as subjectivist, and currently considered the core element in research. The interaction between researcher and research subjects does not happen without consequences for both parties. For this reason, the reflexivity and the analytical concern about this interrelationship became a quality criterion in qualitative research (LAPERRIÈRE, 2010). Although Michel FOUCAULT's main empirical field was historical documents, he was clear about the analytical importance of the processes of objectivation and subjectivation that compose research work. [23]

Michel FOUCAULT reaffirms that experience, in the context of research, is a process that simultaneously transverses and transforms both the subject (researcher) and object (research problem): "a field of experiences in which the subject and the object are both constituted only under certain conditions, but in which they are constantly modified in relation to each other" (1998 [1984], p.460). The research not only changes what the researcher thinks but—by analyzing the character and correlations of its object on its axes of knowledge, power, and subjectivations—it is configured as a contingently produced entity liable to transformation. The research becomes a potential instrument capable of changing a certain state of things and establishing new realities. [24]

The idea that the main role of research is to transform and not only interpret the world originates with MARX in the nineteenth century, but receives greater support in the last quarter of the twentieth century. During the fifth *Congresso Ibero-Americano de Pesquisa Qualitativa em Saúde* in Lisbon, Madel LUZ (2012) presented a historical and contemporary overview of trends in qualitative research. According to LUZ, the current methodological strength of the qualitative method resides in its capacity to produce results and to intervene in what is real—in short, the ability to act instead of comprehending or interpreting. The human and social sciences would also be ruled by this efficacy and by their capacity to produce new technologies and ways of intervention. This dialogue between Foucauldian thinking and a number of other qualitative researchers will be seen in the second axis, with a focus on ethnographers. [25]

3. Eventualization and Ethnography

Michel FOUCAULT used to refer to works other than but similar to his, which he considered at the moment to be a new trend in research, characterized by the "efficacy of dispersed and discontinuous offensives" (1980b [1976], p.80). In this manner, he situated his genealogic strategy inside "a multiplicity of genealogical researches" (p.83). In the methodological scope, he also acknowledged he made use "of the most conventional methods," without worrying, in this aspect, about being original (2000a [1980], p.242). [26]

By using classic procedures of historical research, FOUCAULT considered that his work could be "verified or invalidated" (ibid.), in a possible allusion to the Popperian discussion—strongly present in the 1970s—in which the condition for a scientific postulate to be affirmed results from its capacity to undergo other tests over time. In current times, the discussion of the scientific method has advanced in other ways, in which a good part of the human and social sciences has proven to be less dependent on the model of the natural sciences to affirm their value based on their singular characteristics. The mathematization of the world, which started with the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century and was formalized by René DESCARTES in philosophy—long held as a mark of the reliability of the natural-scientific quantitative thinking—must now share space with other validation criteria, different from the criteria of the natural sciences. In such studies, essential quantitative elements (such as the size of the sample) give way to the necessary deepening of the analysis, even in singular situations with a sample size of one, as can occur in case studies and ethnographies. [27]

Howard BECKER reports that the common standard in quantitative research is the "concern about quantitative methods, about the *a priori* conception of the research, about techniques that minimize the chance of obtaining unreliable findings due to the uncontrollable variability of procedures" (1992 [1970], p.19; my translation). In this case, the recommended procedures have in common the reduction of the area where human judgment can operate, replaced by the application of a procedural rule. Curiously, according to Howard BECKER, the most awarded works in American sociology made use of other methodological resources such as participant observation, historical research, and triangulation. Qualitative research, different from the standard methods, works with what BECKER identified as a craftsmanship model of science, "in which every worker produces the theories and methods necessary to the work that is being done […] the sociologists should feel free to create methods capable of solving the problems of the researches they are doing" (p.12; my translation). [28]

Currently, Howard BECKER's position of valuing the relevance of constructing methodological strategies capable of dealing with complex research problems has become increasingly common in the field of qualitative methodologies. In the 1950s researchers saw the emergence of a renewal of qualitative methods that would grow stronger in the following decades, mainly in the 1970s, reacting, on one hand, to the lack of relevance of standardized empirical studies and, on the other, to the speculative excesses of the big theories with no foundation in

experience. One of the powerful elements of this trend, which absolutely did not supplant the previous one, appeared in the consideration of subjectivity in the research experience. If at first the greatest concern was with the disciplining of the researcher's subjective bias from influencing the research, there was then the acknowledgment that the research is anchored in the "comprehensive experience" of the researcher, "his personal apprehension of the world, his feelings, his intuitions, his values" (LAPERRIÈRE, 2010, p.414: my translation). As a result, subjectivity becomes a factor that should be highlighted throughout the development of the research, while also receiving analytical treatment, in order to prevent idiosyncratic subjectivisms, and not be put aside, allowing for its insidious and unconscious return. [29]

Nowadays, qualitative methodologies are a multilayered field, containing different epistemological nuances ranging from realistic approaches to more constructivist ones. There is a growing conviction among qualitative researchers that the scientific quality of research does not derive from the size of the sample, nor from the study's qualitative or quantitative nature, but rather from its rigorous and pertinent design. This pluralism does not encompass the hegemony of qualitative methodologies; indeed, methodological approaches of a natural-scientific order prevail over those with a more artisan character when it comes to the search for funding or even evaluation by governmental agencies. [30]

Much of the contemporary literature about qualitative methods is more in tune with the discussions promoted by Michel FOUCAULT than before, and it is not by chance that he is quoted as reference in so many works (GUBRIUM & HOLSTEIN, 1997; HAMANN & SUCKERT, 2018; HOOK, 2007; KENDALL & WICKHAM, 1999). In this article I stress that the dialogue with methodological traditions, far from representing a conservative position, can allow for the construction of innovative contributions that are more consistently anchored. [31]

A strong element of connection between Michel FOUCAULT's work and conventional research strategies relates to the oldest of the strategies within the social sciences and the creator of the first qualitative methodological procedures in early twentieth century: ethnography (MACGILCHRIST & VAN HOUT, 2011). Since his book "The Order of Things" was published in 1966, Michel FOUCAULT has repeatedly mentioned ethnology, regarding it as one of the privileged kinds of knowledge of modernity, for fostering an on-going principle of criticism and restlessness toward established knowledge (FOUCAULT, 1971 [1966]). Among many other statements, most of which were made in interviews, I point out one: "I could define it [my research] as an analysis of the cultural facts which characterize our culture. In this sense, it would be something like ethnology of the culture to which we belong" (FOUCAULT, 1994 [1967], p.605). [32]

FOUCAULT's identification with ethnographic research occurs not only in a figurative sense, but also methodologically. I highlight the devaluation of the knowledge called universal in relation to what anthropologists call "local knowledge," the foundation of ethnographic research. Clifford GEERTZ understood that universal knowledge suffered from the evils of banality and

irrelevance. In contrast, in local knowledge, the "direct and open acknowledgment of limits—this observer, in this time, at that place—is one of the things that most recommends this whole style of doing research" (2001, p.137). It thus involves a situated observer who, from the place where he stands, develops his observations. If this seems to be limiting, it nonetheless enables the production of detailed data, without presenting a view that came from nowhere. It is possible to ask about the validity of a circumscribed knowledge. Clifford GEERTZ's response has an ethical tone. He suggests that, if one seeks technical control of social life, the search for universal knowledge would be justifiable. However, if one seeks to construct a life worth living, one should pursue a less ambitious scientific project. [33]

Considering that a research design is rooted in the singularity composed by a researcher in a specific moment in a specific place, what is the criterion needed to assess the legitimacy of the task? Several answers have emerged, among which I will highlight one, provided by anthropology. For qualitative data not to be configured as weak, random, or irrelevant, it should be considered in all its complexity. It is imperative to work with what Clifford GEERTZ called "thick description" (GEERTZ, 1973, p.10). The detailing of an expanded set of the "ingredient in the situation" (p.9), in its multiplicity and variation, is what allows the production of consistency for the data, which results in intense fieldwork (whether empirical or documental) and in the analysis of the research *corpus*. [34]

This detailed singularity forms a solid anchoring point for research, which, in Michel FOUCAULT's case, did not refer to an empirical geographical sphere, but rather a historical-geographical one, through a specific historical series geographically located in Europe. His research incorporated a varied set of documents, including contemporary manuscripts, works of art, philosophical texts, regulations and legislation, official or personal documents, and others. What he called "eventualization" (1991a [1978], p.76) was precisely this recovery and analysis of the research object, taken not as an invariable thing, but as a singular historical experience. [35]

This notion was expanded in a debate about his book "Discipline and Punish" (1977 [1975]), held in 1978 with a group of historians (1991a [1978]). On that occasion, FOUCAULT presented one of his clearest discussions about method. He defines it as "a useful procedure of analysis" *(p.76)* that has two movements, or two political-theoretical functions, as a *par destruens*/*pars construens*. The first operates by rupture and aims to bring about a singularity in which the existence of a historical constancy would be imagined. It is important to break with the evidence upon which our knowledge is grounded by adopting a nominalist critical strategy. [36]

The second aspect of this procedure seeks to find the connections once again, the power plays, the barriers, which together, at a given moment, form what will become a universality, a necessity, building a "causal multiplication" that consists of an analysis of the event "according to the multiple processes that constitute it" (p.77). FOUCAULT proposes around a singular event a "polyhedron of intelligibility, the number of whose faces is not given in advance and can never

properly be taken as finite," moving forward analytically, as he reflects, "by progressive, necessarily incomplete saturation" (ibid.). At the same time, FOUCAULT notes that the more we progress in the decomposition of the internal process of the studied object, the more we should advance "to construct their external relations of intelligibility" (p.78). To him, the internal decomposition of processes and the multiplication of external analyses move hand in hand. This movement ultimately promotes a growing polymorphism of the elements, relationships, and reference domains of an open object of research procedurally constructed. [37]

His research about penal imprisonment as an event involved the definition of multiple concurrent processes, precedent practices, comparison with other historical experiences such as the handling of plagues, the analysis of imprisonment processes, the material and institutional apparatus of the prison, and the institutions and legislation, among others, all of which needed to be decomposed and analyzed. However, the in-depth study of the details required, concomitantly, connections with aspects of external intelligibility, such as schooling practices, military discipline, and hospital organization—in other words, with that which he came to call an expanded disciplinary society. It was essential to analyze his object of research in connection with broader social processes, guaranteeing a perspective of external intelligibility in his study of an object that was simultaneously contingent and pluralized in its constitution (i.e., the multiplication of causes, analyzed in a polyhedron of intelligibility). [38]

Three aspects characterized Michel FOUCAULT's definition of these mixed states, which he calls *dispositif*. First, a *dispositif* is a heterogeneous ensemble, which includes "discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid" (1980c [1976], p.194). Second, there is a dynamic relationship between these elements, a strategic game involving changes in positions and roles. Finally, a *dispositif* is formed at a precise historical moment, aiming to answer an urgent call. Within this complex architecture, the analysis of an apparatus involves the construction of the "polyhedron of intelligibility" (FOUCAULT, 1991a [1978], p.76), composed of internal and external elements (in the explanatory effect in which this distinction is still justified), whose analytical saturation tends to remain unfinished. [39]

4. A Discussion of Method in Foucault's Research

In his final research on the subject of desire, Michel FOUCAULT discusses in wider detail the reasons for his methodological choices (1985 [1984]). In that study, he presented his theoretical-methodological perspective grounded in the notion of experience, composed by the axes of knowledge, power, and subjectivation, and built upon the trajectory followed in his previous work. In his construction of the object, he points to supporting work by two contemporary experts in the field of Greek and Roman antiquity, Peter BROWN and Pierre HADOT, in addition to counting on direct collaboration with the historian Paul VEYNE. In other words, he had a plural theoretical reference, in accordance with the needs of the research in progress, instead of an exclusively Nietzschean focus, as some people imagined. This trend of plurality within theoretical references has become increasingly constant in research within human and social sciences. [40]

FOUCAULT understood theoretical work as something always in process and permanent transformation. He did not seek to establish and fix a set of positions within which he would remain, forming a coherent and finished system. On the contrary, he stated: "My problem, or the only theoretical work that I feel is possible for me, is leaving the trace, in the most intelligible outline possible, of the movements by which I am no longer at the place I was earlier" (2011, p.69; my translation). [41]

Michel FOUCAULT acknowledged that his studies were historical, but not the work of a historian, rather, "a philosophical exercise" (1985 [1984], p.9). This is one of the few moments where he appears to be reconciled with his condition as a philosopher. His instruments of analysis consisted of the distinction between the elements of a moral code and the elements of asceticism, or practices of self, privileging his approach to the latter differentially. His *corpus* consisted of old texts of prescriptive character that aimed to suggest rules of conduct—in other words, practical texts that "served as functional devices [*dispositifs*] that would enable individuals to question their own conduct [...] and to shape themselves as ethical subjects" (p.13). [42]

It is worth pointing out that the methodological design of that research was not defined in advance. The study on "The History of Sexuality," started in 1976 and finished in 1984, was based on the relationships between knowledge and power, gradually collected elements that highlighted the theme of subjectivity. That work led him to a broader theoretical-methodological shift. Therefore, his theoretical-methodological choices, which are part of his *introduction* to the book, are produced and justified after the beginning of his research, within his working guideline to always "know how and to what extent it might to be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known" (1985 [1984], p.9), a mark of his philosophical journey. [43]

His aim was "to study the games of truth in the relationship of self with self and forming of oneself as a subject" (p.6) in tune with a broader project of performing

a genealogy of the modern subject. The goal was to deconstruct a consensus of that time, placing sexuality at the center of subjectivity, and promoting alternatives to this possibility. In his view, the biggest problem of his era, and perhaps of ours as well, would be to release the subject from the hegemonic type of subjectivation, that is, "to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries" (FOUCAULT, 2000c, p.336). [44]

Michel FOUCAULT's work resonates with perspectives regarding what is defined as quality in qualitative research. Quality is measured, among other criteria, by explanations about how the research is defined, managed in the stages of this decision-making process, and produced step-by-step. Michel FOUCAULT, throughout his work, was careful when presenting his investigative path to his readers and students, along with his methodological choices, and justified, when necessary, changes in his trajectory. In this manner, he upheld the virtue of a classic researcher by being explicit in the discussion of how he carried out his investigative process. [45]

5. Conclusion

Methodological discussions are present throughout Michel FOUCAULT's entire body of work—in his books and his courses. In all of this, there is no single method strictly designed and reproduced in each piece of research, but the construction of an investigative analysis does exist, with variations according to the purpose of each project. The philosopher called for the prevalence of the object over method and conducted his work in a predominantly inductive manner, as is the current tendency in human sciences research. [46]

FOUCAULT claimed that his work methods came close to those of traditional historiographic research. Moreover, his methodological strategies had a considerable affinity with ethnographic research: the first great strategy of qualitative research developed in the 1920s, which would influence qualitative research in the social sciences for the next decade. [47]

Unlike field ethnographers, documents and texts were Michel FOUCAULT's preferred *corpus*. However, he existentially maintained the posture of an ethnographer of his time, observing what happened, permanently scrutinizing who we are at a given moment, and where our intolerable is. That posture was directly linked to his research, deemed "a fragment of autobiography" (2000b [1981], p.458) not only in the personal sense, but also in the sociopolitical sense. His historical-documentary research had as a final aim the present as he observed it, which he acknowledges in "Discipline and Punish" (1977 [1975]) while stating that he learned more about the political technology of the body in the present than through history. The same occurred with his analysis of the relationship between psychiatric power and madness, conducted in the course of two years at Saint-Anne as a psychologist, through conversations with patients: "without ever having to exercise the power related to the psychiatric knowledge, I could nonetheless observe it all the time" (FOUCAULT, 2006 [1975], pp.70-71;

my translation). I understand that this construction of relevant and contemporary research problems, linked to accurate and detailed work and in dialogue with classic strategies in research, contributed to the incisive impact of his work in our time. [48]

I advocate that it is better to read Michel FOUCAULT based on his analytics than on the legacy of his theoretical creed. If in Foucault the process of theorization was more important than the final theoretical synthesis, then present qualitative researchers should guide their reading of his work by placing his theoretical-methodological dimension above the theoretical-thematic one. In other words, in his work, analytics—how to think—should prevail over theory. Hence, the emphasis of this study is to point out that researchers' attention should not only be on reproducing Michel FOUCAULT's concepts but also on following his form of theorization and his problematization analytics. In this sense, FOUCAULT wove theoretical articulations from a specific empirical field into all his research work, using his concepts as a toolbox in dialogue with other tools and strategies. [49]

In conclusion, current researchers should not follow him by taking the lazy route of quotation or reproducing the same problems FOUCAULT encountered, but by constructing their own research problems and instruments, without waiving a dialogue with classic methods, as those methods can be useful in contemporary research. This movement can be observed in the methodological discussion of his final work on the genealogy of the subject of desire, based on practices of the self in Greco-Roman antiquity. [50]

Scholars can honor FOUCAULT's legacy by conducting diligent work that differs from a mere repetition of an author's words and maintains his greater commitment to the construction and analysis of the object of investigation. I avoided in this article an approach that serves merely to teach how to carry out research according to the Foucauldian methodology. Michel FOUCAULT had no *a priori* methodology preceding each study he undertook. However, by constructing each research object, he at the same time wove a unique methodological strategy, marked by some of the genealogical principles explored here. He defined his investigative path as being that of an experimenter, not of a theorist. His efforts distanced him from guarantees based on a global theoretical system, bringing him closer to a local and singular analytical task, an experience through which subject and object are formed and transformed. [51]

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